

PRESS RELEASE

Congressman John Conyers, Jr.

Fourteenth District, Michigan
Ranking Member, Committee on the Judiciary
Dean, Congressional Black Caucus

IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
June 2, 2003

CONTACT: Dena Graziano
202-226-6888

CONYERS: "IG REPORT CONFIRMS JUSTICE DEPARTMENT'S WAR ON TERRORISM IS JUST A WAR ON THE CONSTITUTION AND BASIC HUMAN DIGNITIES"

Congressman John Conyers, Jr. issued the following statement regarding the report by the Inspector General of the Department of Justice on the treatment of 9/11 detainees:

"This report confirms my worst fears about the unaccountable Ashcroft Justice Department, that its war on terrorism is just a war on the Constitution and basic human dignities. This report presents stark evidence that the DOJ has deprived detainees of fundamental constitutional rights and has employed shocking and un-American tactics of torture and abuse. I fear that, in fighting terrorism, Ashcroft would tear down the foundations of our democracy.

When the Attorney General appears before the Judiciary Committee on Thursday, I will hold him fully accountable for this. Some troubling highlights from the report include:

- The Department kept the detainees in harsh, inhuman conditions. At the Bureau of Prison's facility (Metropolitan Detention Center in Brooklyn, New York), detainees were subject to physical and verbal abuse by MDC staff and their cells were illuminated 24 hours per day;
- In New York City, the FBI and INS did not distinguish between detaining aliens connected to the attacks and detaining those who had no connection to the attacks but came up in a September 11 lead. The Department should have detained only those for whom it had some basis to suspect a connection to terrorism;
- The Justice Department held detainees an average of 80 days; and
- The INS did not serve notices of immigration charges on detainees within specified timeframes. This affected ability of the detainees not only to understand why there were being held but also to obtain legal counsel and to request bond hearings.

This report should remind us of what an unchecked and out of control Justice Department can do. The Inspector General conducted his investigation under section 1001 of the USA PATRIOT Act, which charges him with investigating allegations of civil rights and civil liberties abuses made against Justice Department employees. While I opposed the Patriot Act in its final form, I authored this provision. But for that clause hidden in the most rushed and misguided piece of legislation the Congress has ever seen, the abuses of the Ashcroft Justice Department would have been hidden forever from the American people."

##JUD-108-06/02/03##